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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 001402

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG - LAWRENCE
LONDON, PARIS, ROME AND USEU FOR NEA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/07/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [TS](#)
SUBJECT: SENIOR MOI OFFICIAL REMOVED: SIGN TO HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMUNITY?

REF: A. TUNIS 1308

- [1](#)B. TUNIS 1204
- [1](#)C. TUNIS 1155
- [1](#)D. TUNIS 816
- [1](#)E. TUNIS 557
- [1](#)F. TUNIS 501
- [1](#)G. 05 TUNIS 2548
- [1](#)H. 05 TUNIS 2329

Classified By: AMBASSADOR WILLIAM HUDSON FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On June 5, President Ben Ali unexpectedly announced the dismissal of a senior Ministry of Interior (MOI) official who some believe to be responsible for an uptick in the GOT's harsh repression of Tunisian civil society. As Secretary of State for National Security, Mohamed Ali Ganzoui was widely considered part of Ben Ali's inner circle. His dismissal may be meant as a signal to domestic and international audiences who have increasingly criticized the heavy-handed GOT response to local activists. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) On June 6, Tunisian media reported that, during a June 5 meeting with Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi and Minister of Interior Rafik Bel Haj Kacem, President Ben Ali removed MOI Secretary of State for National Security Mohamed Ali Ganzoui. The position was downgraded to Director General for National Security and former Director General of the National Guard, Abdessatar Bennour, was named to fill it. The former Governor of the state of Sousse, Abdelrahman Limam, will replace Bennour at the National Guard. Press reports stated that Ganzoui will assume "other duties" not yet specified or announced.

[1](#)3. (C) Ganzoui served as Secretary of State for National Security for almost eight years during two different terms. Beginning his career as a police officer, Ganzoui climbed the Ministry of Interior ranks for almost twenty years before being named Secretary of State in 1995. Ganzoui held this position until April 2002, when he was sacked, along with the Minister of Interior, following the al-Qaeda bombing of a Jewish synagogue on the southern Tunisian island of Djerba. After serving as Tunisian Ambassador to Syria from 2002-2003, Ganzoui returned to Tunisia as manager of a state-owned company. In November 2005, Ben Ali reappointed him as Secretary of State, apparently in response to GOT frustration

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over civil society activism and international criticism following a U.N. summit in Tunisia (Ref G).

14. (C) Ganzoui's tenure was marked by increased GOT repression of civil society activism. While an October hunger strike (Ref H) was allowed to proceed peacefully, almost all subsequent independent civil society events (Refs B-D and F) have been disrupted - sometimes violently - since Ganzoui returned to the MOI. GOT efforts to prevent the May 27 Congress of the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH, Ref A) were the most violent in recent memory, and for the first time, the GOT actively tried to prevent international observers from witnessing the event. These months of repression only increased Tunisian civil society activism (including a lawyers' sit in, several attempted demonstrations, labor strikes, etc.). International criticism of GOT tactics grew in frequency and volume, including an April 3 Department statement on civil society harassment and a May 29 statement on the LTDH by the French Foreign Ministry.

15. (C) Local observers believe it was the increased criticism of the regime's response to civil society activism that led to Ganzoui's ousting. One human rights activist told Poloff that the U.S. statement in particular appears to have forced Ben Ali to take action. The activist theorized that, having brought back Ganzoui to control domestic opposition, Ben Ali has now decided that the security response has exceeded its usefulness domestically and internationally. Ben Ali will thus be able to point to Ganzoui's removal as evidence of his personal commitment to human rights.

16. (C) COMMENT: While it is possible that this is a direct response to criticism of GOT policies, it is unclear what political jockeying took place behind the scenes. Ganzoui may have begun to outshine Interior Minister Kacem or even appeared to threaten Ben Ali himself, who, while concurrently

serving as Prime Minister and Interior Minister, organized the coup that installed him as President in 1987. (NOTE: Many Tunisians have remarked to emboffs over the past few months that Ganzoui's power had clearly eclipsed his minister's, some even calling him the "real" Minister of Interior. END NOTE.) This may simply be part of Ben Ali's continuing his efforts to solidify his power by removing challengers and empowering allies, as he did with a recent expansion of the ruling party political bureau (Ref E). Ganzoui was also rumored to be supported by the President's wife, Leila Ben Ali, perhaps more than by the President himself. The real purpose will become clearer once Ganzoui's new duties are announced; only another senior government position would suggest that he is still among the President's inner circle. END COMMENT.
HUDSON